

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 560
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Electra

Euripides

**Translated from the original Greek by
Alexander Harvey**



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**HALDEMAN-JULIUS COMPANY
GIRARD, KANSAS**

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ELECTRA

CHARACTERS

HUSBANDMAN: a small farmer of noble birth, husband to Electra in name only.

ELECTRA: daughter of the slain King Agamemnon.

CHORUS: a group of maidens dwelling in Mycenae.

ORESTES: brother to Electra.

PYLADES: friend to Orestes.

OLD MAN: tutor to the late King Agamemnon.

MESSENGER: one of the retinue of Orestes.

CLYTEMNESTRA: widow of the late King Agamemnon and wife to his successor.

ÆGISTHUS: successor to Agamemnon on the throne.

DIOSCURI: twin gods, brothers to Clytemnestra.

Retinue of Orestes: Women in the Queen's suite.

Scene: a farmer's house and grounds not far from Mycenae. **Time:** the heroic age of Greece.

ELECTRA

ACT I.

The scene is rural, suggesting a farm. A cottage, apparently that of a farmer, stands well back of the road running in both directions off the scene. There is a garden patch in the foreground, behind the palings of a fence. A large tree spreads its branches over the road, its trunk being within the grounds. All suggests perfect neatness and thrift.

The region is Argolis, somewhat remote from the city of Argos but not so remote from the town of Mycenae. It is about the break of day. Some stars glitter overhead.

Standing beside the fence is a farmer. He is in the prime of life and evidently a prosperous agricultural type, dressed for the field but well clad. He is referred to in the text as the husbandman.

Husbandman. Oh, Argos, ancient town of this old country, and ye waters of Inachus from which once upon a time King Agamemnon—having borne the warriors of Mars—on his thousand ships voyaged to the Trojan land! Having slain Priam, ruler in that land of Ilion, and taking the glorious town of Dardanus

(*ancestor of the Trojans and through them of the Romans*) he arrived in his Argos here again. In the lofty temples he placed the spoils of many barbarians. There (*at Troy*) he met with good fortune. But at home he died by the cunning of his wife Clytemnestra, and the hand of Aegisthus, son of Thyestes. And he (*Agamemnon*) leaving the ancient sceptre of Tantalus to another, perished.

Aegisthus rules the land, having the other one's wife, the daughter of Tyndarus. (*Clytemnestra*). Those he (*Agamemnon*) left behind in his home when he sailed for Troy—the boy Orestes and the slip of a girl Electra—the one was abducted by his father's old tutor as he was about to perish at the hand of Aegisthus and was given over to be brought up in the land of the Phocaeans by Strophius, (*Strophius, king of the Phocian or Phocaeen people, married the sister of Agamemnon, Anaxibia, who was the mother of Pylades, the faithful friend of Orestes*), while the girl Electra remained in the home of her father.

When she had attained the bloom of youth, suitors, the first youths of the land of Hellas, sought her out. Fearing lest she bear to one of the Argives boys to become avengers of Agamemnon, Aegisthus kept her at home and

did not unite her with any bridegroom. Yet as this was fraught with much peril, for she might in secret bear children to some distinguished man, her mother (*Clytemnestra*) though cruel hearted, saved her nevertheless from the clutches of Aegisthus who had made up his mind to kill her. As regards her husband, indeed, she had a pretext, yet she dreaded lest she become odious through the slaughter of her children. Therefore Aegisthus contrived this plan. He promised money to any who slew him who had left the land in flight, the son of Agamemnon, and he bestowed Electra for a wife upon me—I being born of Mycenaean parents. (*Agamemnon was king of Mycenae*). On that score, I am irreproachable for my family is good in origin although poverty stricken in possessions and for that reason my nobility is extinct. So bestowing her upon a weak man he would feel little dread, for if a man having influence had her he would have recalled the forgotten murder of Agamemnon and punishment would have come to Aegisthus.

Now this man (*he strikes his own breast*) has never polluted her bed and she (*Electra*) is at this moment a virgin—Venus will swear it with me (*or, knows it as well as I do*). For I should be ashamed, after having received in

my home the daughter of men of power and might and fame and wealth, to offer her any insult, seeing that I am not on her level.

I am sorry for the suffering of Orestes, who is allied to me by marriage in form only, if ever he should come to Argos and see the unfortunate marriage his sister made. He who says I am a fool because, having in my power a young virgin, I leave her inviolate, may rest assured that he estimates virtue according to the standards of his own vile mind and that it is he who is what he considers me.

There is a voice of sorrow within the cottage at which the Husbandman starts. He takes up a rake and is about to hurry off along the road to the right when the cottage door opens and Electra emerges.

She is a well developed, vigorous girl of about twenty-four. Her hair is "bobbed"—a sign of mourning for women in the heroic age of Greece and she is simply but tastefully attired in the short tunic of the country woman. Her feet are bare as are her arms. She supports an urn on her head. She answers the salutation of the Husbandman with a gesture and then looks up at the sky in which the stars are shining although morning has all but broken.

Electra. Oh, black night, nurse of the golden

stars, night in which, bearing this vase, supported upon this head, I wend my way to the river springs—not indeed that I am reduced to any such dire necessity but that I may manifest to the gods the insolence of Aegisthus—into the vast empyrean I send my complaints for my father. For the all-wicked daughter of Tyn-dareus has thrown me from her house, doing service in that way to her husband. She has borne other children to Aegisthus and she deals with Orestes and with me as if we were aliens in her home.

Electra lifts her free hand to her brow and covers her eyes.

Husbandman. Why, poor girl, do you take all this trouble for my sake—you so delicately reared having all that labor? Why do you not give it up since I ask you? (*He approaches as if he meant to relieve her head of its burden but she makes a deprecating gesture and readjusts the urn on her head.*)

Electra. I deem you as dear to me as are the very gods. You have not outraged me amid my woes. Great is the good fortune of mortals when they find a healer for their dire suffering such as I have found in you. It behooves me, though I am not bidden, to share with you your toils, relieving you of fatigue as far as

my strength will allow so that you may endure it the more readily. You have enough labor to do outdoors. I ought to attend to what concerns the interior of the house. It is pleasant to the worker when he comes in from outdoors to find all things put to rights.

Husbandman. If it seems good to you, go. The springs are not, in fact, far from the house. I, as soon as the day breaks, having led the cattle into the pasture, I will sow the furrows. No idler, however he may have the gods on his lips, can support a life without labor.

Electra readjusts the urn on top of her head and with a smile to the Husbandman, goes off towards the left. The Husbandman, looking after her for a moment, retires on the right.

When they are well out of sight the figure of a youth is seen stealing through the grounds behind the humble cottage. This youth is Orestes, brother to Electra. Orestes is a few years older than Electra and there is a striking personal resemblance between them, although he is taller and heavier. Orestes seems anxious, despite the strong sword he bears and the helmet and breastplate and powerful boots that afford him protection from any sudden onslaught. Closely following Orestes is Pylades, his bosom friend. Pylades is of the same age

as Orestes but not so stalwart and not so heavily armed. The two continue to steal forward, looking right and left and now one and then the other takes refuge from observation behind a tree. Feeling persuaded that they are not observed, Orestes emerges completely to view in front of the cottage and Pylades follows his example.

Orestes. Pylades, in you more than in all other men I have found a faithful friend and host. Alone of my friends, you honored this poor Orestes, enduring what I have endured, suffering tremendous evils at the hands of Aegisthus who slew my father with the help of my utterly wicked mother. Now am I come at the strange bidding of a god (*Apollon*) upon this Argive soil, no one suspecting it, for I wish to pay the murderers of my father with murder.

(*He seems to hear a sound and hides behind a tree and so does Pylades but they emerge for it is a false alarm. Orestes resumes.*)

Coming this very night to the tomb of my father, I gave of my tears and offered the tribute of my hair (*signs of grief in antiquity*) and on his funeral pyre I caused to flow the blood of a sheep, concealing it all from the men who rule this land. And I will not set foot inside the walls of the city. I am, none the less,

come to the confines of this region, having combined the execution of two plans. In order that I may make my escape to some other country if any of the spies here should recognize me as I seek my sister—for it is said that she lives now in wedlock, being no longer a virgin—and in order that I may come into contact with her and enlist her as an accomplice in the killing, I must learn fully what is going on within the walls (of Argos).

Pylades hides suddenly behind a tree and Orestes, seeing no cause for alarm, beckons him forth.

Now let us turn our steps out of the main road. (*He points to the sky*). Aurora raises her pale face. For some laborer or some woman servant will appear to us whom we can question as to whether my sister lives in these places. Let us sit down.

(Orestes and Pylades take shelter apart behind some bushes where they can see without being seen.)

I see one of the servants carrying upon her close cropped head a pitcher from the spring.

Electra emerges slowly into view bearing the urn upon her head. Without leaving his sequestered nook, Orestes finishes his speech.

We may learn from this woman slave

whether she is in a position to give us some information regarding the things for which we have come to this country.

Electra advances along the road until she has come to the gate in the palings, whereupon she pauses but she does not become aware of the presence of either Orestes or Pylades.

Electra (setting her water urn upon the roots of a tree.) Urge on, it is time, the pace of your foot! *(She is urging herself forward.)* On, on, amid your tears. Alas! I was born a daughter of Agamemnon and of Clytemnestra *(Orestes starts)*, the hateful daughter herself of Tyndareus it was who bore me. The townsmen call me the unfortunate Electra. Oh! for my griefs so hard to bear and for my hateful life! Oh, my father Agamemnon, you are prone now in Hades, slain by your wife and by Aegisthus!

She sits down in the highway and buries her head in her hands whereupon Orestes emerges slightly from his place of concealment. Electra resumes her plaint.

Come, raise once more that same lament, its tearful and melancholy satisfaction. *(She gets up.)* Hasten, for it is time, the pace of your foot. Forward though you shed your tears! What a city, what a house, oh, unfor-

fortunate brother, now holds you in durance, leaving behind you a pitiable sister in the home of your father to endure the direst woes! May you come back from your ordeals to avenge me, the woful, oh, Jove, Jove, and avenge my father as well because of his most odious murder—oh, may you soon direct your footsteps towards Argos! Set down again this vase, take it off your head. (*She sets it down.*) Let me exclaim with cries against the doom of my father, let me utter shrieks by night, may my clamor and my chants be a song to Pluto (*god of the realm below*). Father, I address you, beneath the earth in cries to which I give myself up day by day, rending my neck with my nails and raising a violent hand against my shorn head for thy death. (*She is overcome and seems ready to fall.*)

Orestes emerges more definitely as Electra tears her hair and her neck with her fingers as was usual in that heroic age to express lamentation.

Ah! tear your head! Like a singing swan by the waves of a river that calls upon a cherished parent who has perished in the deceptive toils of a net, so I mourn for you, oh my unfortunate father who for the last time laved your form and face in the last of all baths in the pitiable

bed of death. (*Agamemnon was slain in his bath.*) Alas! for the dire wound of that axe, my father, and for the relentless plot against your life after your return from Troy! Ah! me! Your wife did not welcome you with fillets nor with garlands on her head but having made you an object of outrage by means of a two-edged sword, the grim ignominy of Aegisthus, she took him for her clandestine spouse.

Electra seems about to collapse again. Orestes, obviously disconcerted by the arrival of newcomers, hides behind a tree. During the closing words of the lament of Electra, a group of young girls of the neighborhood make their appearance. They live in or near the capital, Mycene or Mycenae, seat of the government of the region. The young ladies are all prettily clad in the peplum or folding upper garment and in robes that nearly touch the ground, leaving the feet free in sandals. Their heads are wreathed in flowers. They are moved to compassion at the spectacle presented by Electra. They form what is called technically in Greek tragedy the Chorus but they do not all speak or sing at once. They surround Electra.

Chorus. Oh, daughter of Agamemnon, Elec-

tra, I am come to your rustic abode. (*The maid who says this lays a hand affectionately upon the head of Electra.*)

There has come to this place a townsman of Mycenae, a shepherd of the mountain, a drinker of milk. He says the Argives have proclaimed a three-day sacrifice (or a sacrifice to take place in three days).

All the young girls must go to the temple of Juno.

The young ladies laugh and clap their hands but Electra remains mournful.

Electra. Friends, I do not leap with gladness of heart in a garb that adorns me nor have I rings of gold, unfortunate girl that I am! Nor will I beat my foot upon the ground in the dances with the young girls of Argos. It is in tears that I dance and every day I am concerned with grief only. Look upon my hair all torn and disordered and upon my clothes—see if they seem suitable to a daughter of Agamemnon and are appropriate for Troy, which remembers my father, for he captured it.

Chorus. The divinity is great (*Juno*). Come now and accept as a gift from me dresses richly woven and as a pendent to your good looks there are ornaments of gold for you. Do

you think that with your tears, not honoring the gods, you will prevail over your enemies? No, dear girl. You will derive no satisfaction from these lamentations but you will do better by honoring the gods in prayers.

Electra. Not one of the gods hears the cries of the unfortunate Electra, nor remembers the ancient sacrifices of my father. Ah! for him who perished and for him who is today a wanderer, who is living now in an alien land, unfortunate, wending his way to a hearth at which he will be a slave though born of an illustrious line. I myself, consuming my soul, dwell in a humble hovel amid the mountain rocks, exiled from the home of my fathers. My mother, wedded to another, lives in bloody nuptials.

Electra collapses in the arms of the girls.

ACT II.

The scene and the situation remain unchanged, for the interval has been merely brief enough to enable Electra to recover her composure. Orestes and Pylades are hidden in the shrubbery, but they have thrust their heads far forward and are plainly visible. Electra is standing and the girls surround her.

Chorus. Many a woe was caused to the Greeks and to your family by Helen, the sister of your mother. (*This refers to the famous Helen of Troy, one of the wonderful daughters of Leda.*)

Electra. Well, ladies, I have stopped my weeping. (*She utters an exclamation of amazement and discovers Orestes and Pylades in their place of concealment. She shrieks whereupon all the young ladies do the same. Orestes and Pylades at once come out of their hiding place.*) Some strangers here, having lodging near this house, have come forth from their concealment. (*The agitation of the young ladies as the young men advance grows greater.*) Let us run to avoid these evil characters by timely flight—you by way of the path and I into the house.

The young girls make their plans for flight and Electra darts towards the cottage. Orestes intercepts Electra half way and lays a detaining hand upon her arm. The young girls pause to contemplate the episode. Technically speaking, the Chorus has assumed its traditional position on the stage.

Orestes. Stay, poor girl. Do not fear my touch.

Electra. Oh, Phoebus Apollo—I implore thee that I die not!

Orestes. I might kill others far more odious to me than yourself.

Electra. Go—touch not one whom it does not become you to touch!

Orestes. There is none whom I have a better right to touch.

Electra. And how comes it that armed with a sword, you overwhelm me at my door?

Orestes. Listen—stay—soon you will not say otherwise than as I do.

Electra. I have stopped. I am entirely at your service. You are the stronger.

Orestes. I come bringing news of your brother. (*Electra stares and then looks from Pylades—standing mute beneath a tree—back to Orestes.*)

Electra. Dearest—is he alive or dead?

Orestes. He lives. I would first of all tell you good news, you see.

Electra. May you prosper—as a reward for your sweet words!

Orestes. I hope your good wishes will apply to us both.

Electra. In what part of the world is the unfortunate youth in his sorrowful exile? ,

Orestes. He wears himself out in obeying not one city's laws but those of many. (*He goes from town to town.*)

Electra. Is he perhaps in want of his daily bread?

Orestes. He has that but an exiled man is weak.

Electra. But bearing what message from him are you here?

Orestes. To see if you live and in what woe you live your life.

Electra. Then first of all observe how my form is wasted.

Orestes. Worn away by woe, as I see you, I must grieve.

Electra. And my head has been shorn by the razor.

Orestes. With a brother and a father dead, you are wounded indeed.

Electra. Ah! Who could be dearer to me than they were?

Orestes. And how dear do you think you are to your brother?

Electra. He is a friend who is away, not here.

Orestes. But why do you live here so far from the city?

Electra. I am wedded, stranger, in a fatal marriage.

Orestes. I grieve for your brother—are you married to one of the Mycenaeans?

Electra. Not to him upon whom my father hoped to bestow me some day.

Orestes. Speak, so that, having heard you, I may inform your brother.

Electra. Far from him (*Orestes*) I live in this place.

Orestes. Some digger or cowherd is fit to live here, in this house.

Electra. He is a poor man, but well born and he treats me with perfect respect.

Orestes. But this respect, what does it mean in a husband?

Electra. Never has he ventured to touch my bed.

Orestes. Has he made some vow of chastity or does he disdain you?

Electra. He deemed it unworthy to insult my parents.

Orestes. And why, having made such a marriage, does he not enjoy it?

Electra. He did not consider that the man who gave me had a right to do so, oh stranger!

Orestes. I see. He feared lest he pay a penalty some day to Orestes.

Electra. He feared that very thing. Then too he is naturally good.

Orestes. Ah! You are speaking of a noble man. He must be nobly dealt with.

Electra. If ever he who is now absent should return to these regions!

Orestes. And your mother, she who bore you, did she put up with all this?

Electra. Oh, stranger, women are the friends of their husband, not of their children!

Orestes. But why did Aegisthus outrage you in this style?

Electra. He wanted me to become the mother of helpless offspring by giving me to such a one.

Orestes. So that you might not bear children to avenge Agamemnon?

Electra. He planned things for which I hope he may pay the penalty to me.

Orestes. And does the husband of your mother know that you are a virgin yet?

Electra. He does not. We hide that from him in silence.

Orestes. And these young ladies (*indicating the Chorus*) who hear these words of ours, are they friends of yours?

Electra. To the extent of concealing well your words and my own.

Orestes. And what would Orestes do were he to arrive in this Argos?

Electra. You ask? That is a bold question. We are not at home (*Other texts translate: A disgraceful question. Are we not now at the height of our woes?*)

Orestes. But when he comes back how will he slay the murderers of your father?

Electra. He will dare what our father had to endure at the hands of his enemies.

Orestes. And would you dare to slay your mother with him?

Electra. Yes, with the same axe by which my father perished. (*Some stories say that Agamemnon was brained with an axe while others say he was smothered in his bath while yet other versions have it that he was strangled with his bath robe.*)

Orestes. Am I to tell him these things and to say that these resolves of yours are fixed?

Electra. May I die shedding the blood of my mother!

Orestes. Ah—would that Orestes were here listening to these things!

Electra. But, stranger, I would not recognize him if I saw him.

Orestes. No wonder — for you were separated from him when you both were young.

Electra. One alone of my friends would recognize him.

Orestes. He who is said to have rescued him from slaughter?

Electra. An old man, the former tutor of my father.

Orestes. But your father—did they give him a tomb when he died?

Electra. He got what he got, being thrown out of the house.

Orestes. Oh—what a thing you are saying! For a perception of a wrong done even to strangers stings one. But speak so that being informed I may tell your brother the sad but indispensable truth. Pity is not innate with the ignorant but with the wise among men. Still, a too sophisticated wisdom is not without its demerit even for the wise.

Chorus (the young ladies manifest the liveliest sympathy throughout.) I too have the same longing in my soul that he has. For being remote from the city, I do not know what evils transpire there and now even I desire to know them.

Electra. I will speak, if I must. I must tell a friend my doom and that of my father. And since you evoke my speech, oh stranger, I implore you to tell Orestes my woes and those of Agamemnon. Tell him first of all in what garb I live and with what filth I am covered, under what roof I dwell, I born in royal halls, making toilsomely the clothes I wear—otherwise I would go naked and bereft—and I must also bear water from the spring, taking no part in festivals and deprived of all joy in the dance. I avoid women, being a virgin still, I blush for Castor, to whom my parents affianced me—I being his kinswoman—before he went to join the gods above. And my mother is seated upon a throne among the spoils of the Trojans and near her seat are slaves from Asia whom my father captured and who recall his prowess with their radiant robes (or mantles from Mount Ida) caught up with brooches of gold. And the blackened blood of my father still pollutes the house while he who slew him is

accustomed to go out in the chariot of my father and takes pride in holding in his hand the sceptre of him he slew, the sceptre with which he (*Agamemnon*) commanded the Greeks. And the tomb of *Agamemnon*, being despised, received never a libation nor a branch of the myrtle and his pyre is destitute of offerings. But the glorious spouse of my mother, as they call him, besotted with drink, dances upon his tomb and hurls stones upon the marble monument of my father and dares to utter words like these in scorn of us: "Where is that boy *Orestes*? Is he here to protect your tomb completely?" With such words is he (*Orestes*) mocked in his absence. (*Orestes clenches his fists and looks in the direction of Pylades who likewise clenches his fists and turns to face two of his retainers, now emerging from their place of concealment in the shrubbery.*) But, oh stranger, I beg of you, tell him this: repeat the sad story. Many a suppliant in whose behalf I might speak would urge you. Mention these hands (*she lifts them*) and this mouth (*she touches it*) and this sorrowing soul and this head all shorn and tell of him who begot him. For it would be an infamy if my father who overthrew the *Phrygians* had a son who could not alone overthrow one solitary

man when he (*Orestes*) has in his favor not alone his youth but the glorious stock from which he sprung!

The young ladies of the Chorus show signs of interest in a newcomer, whereupon Pylades comes forth boldly to the side of Orestes and the excited Electra puts the urn back upon her head.

Chorus. I see here the very man, I mean, your husband, who has ceased from his work and is hurrying home.

At that moment the Husbandman emerges from the right.

Husbandman. Ah! What strangers are these I see at my gates? For what reason have they come to these rustic gates? Do they need me? It is unseemly in a woman to remain alone with young men.

Electra. Oh, dearest, feel no suspicion of me. You shall know what the affair is. These strangers come to me as heralds of the messages of *Orestes*. And you, strangers, pardon what has been said.

Husbandman. What do they say? Does the man (*Orestes*) exist and does he still behold the light of day?

Electra. He lives, from what they say. They say what is not incredible to me.

Husbandman. And do they recall anything of your father and of his sorrows?

Electra. These are things to be optimistic about. A man in exile is impotent.

Husbandman. And what messages from Orestes did they come to bring?

Electra. He sent them to spy into my sorrows.

Husbandman. And some they see and some you have told them?

Electra. They know. They have no lack of information.

Husbandman. Then the doors should have been open to them this long time. (*To Orestes and Pylades.*) Come inside the house. In return for your good news, you shall have hospitality such as my house affords. (*He beckons the followers of Pylades and Orestes, who have come forth more completely from the shrubbery.*) Followers, take their things into the house. (*He is obeyed whereupon he turns again to Orestes and Pylades.*) You who come here as friends in behalf of a friendly man, make no remonstrance, find no fault. For though I was born poor, I will not for that reason show an ignoble manner. (*Or, though humble, my manners are not vulgar.*)

Orestes (apart to Electra). Ha! Is this the

man, in the name of the gods, who has made a marriage with you and yet does not want to bring shame upon Orestes?

Electra. He goes by the name of my husband, unfortunate girl that I am!

Orestes. Ha! There is no sure test of manliness. The natures of mortals have their contradictions. I have already seen one man, begotten by a noble father, who turned out a thing of no consequence, yet there have been good children from evil parents. I have found poverty of mind in the thoughts of a rich man, and a great soul in a little body (*or a wealthy nature, in a poor physique*). How then is any one to judge things with right discernment? Through wealth? He would display unsound judgment. Or from the lack of things, from the fact that men have nothing? Yet poverty has its vices and it teaches men to be vile from necessity. Shall I turn to the men of arms (*soldiers*)—then who, looking at the lance, would be certain that he who wields it is a good man? The best way is to let these things turn out as they may. And this man, who is not great among the Argives, nor yet distinguished, through the line of his ancestry, being one of the many, is found to be among the best of men! Will you not cease from your

airs of mightiness, you who are filled with vain vanities and thus go astray and will you not henceforth judge the nobility of a man by his manners and his principles? They it is who sway wisely homes and cities. Bodies on top of which are empty heads are but decorations in the public assembly. A strong arm does not support the onrush of the foe with a lance more bravely than one that is weak. That sort of thing depends upon nature and greatness of soul.

The young ladies of the Chorus receive these sentiments with every manifestation of approval and Pylades is obviously edified. Thereupon Orestes turns to Electra again, resuming his remarks.

Well, let us accept the hospitality of this home. The son of Agamemnon, he who is present and yet who is not present and for whose sake we came here is worthy too. Friends (*he turns to the retinue of servants*) we must go within this cottage. Let me have a poor host who is eager to please me rather than a rich one who is not. I am pleased with my reception in the home of this man. (*To Electra.*) I should like it better all the same if your brother in good fortune led me into a house of prosperity. Perhaps he will come yet. The

oracles of Apollo are sure. Yet I deem mortal divination a jest.

Chorus. Electra, now we are warmed in heart more than we were before from the joy in our souls. Perhaps fortune, coming slowly, will be all the brighter and more beautiful.

Orestes and Pylædes go within the cottage accompanied by their retinue. Some farm hands appear and make their way likewise within the cottage. Electra turns to her "husband."

Electra. Unfortunate man—knowing as you do the poverty of your home, why did you receive these strangers into it, who are finer and greater than yourself?

Husbandman. Why? They are well born just as they seem to be and in a little cottage or in a house that is not little they will be content. (Or, they know how to accommodate themselves to the small, as well as to the great.)

Electra. Well, since you are in humble circumstances and have committed this error (of judgment in asking them to share your food), go to the dear old tutor of my father. He was driven from town and is serving as a shepherd beside the river Tanaus, that forms the boundaries of the Argive land from the Spartan soil. When he comes home bid him come here and supply me with something for the meal of my

guests. He will surely rejoice and give thanks to the gods when he learns that the child he saved still lives. For we shall obtain nothing from my ancestral home, the house of my fathers. We should be announcing news that would turn out bad for ourselves if that hapless household learned that Orestes is still in the land of the living.

Husbandman. Well, if that is your wish, I will announce your news to the old man. Now go into the house as soon as you can and make ready what is within. A woman, if she will, can certainly find many supplies at hand for a meal. We still have enough left in the house to supply these people with food for at least one day. In such circumstances when I come to think of them I see how riches have a great power not only to afford hospitality to guests but to save through timely expenditure the body that has lapsed into sickness. As regards food from day to day, that amounts to little. Every man, be he rich or poor, when he is sufficiently fed, feels the same satisfaction (or, carries the like amount when he is filled).

The Husbandman disappears in the direction indicated by Electra. The maidens of the "Chorus" make signals of amity and approval to Electra. Orestes is seen looking from a

small platform on the roof of the farmhouse and Pylades thrusts his head out of an upper loft through an aperture that might serve as a window but is in reality a door through which hay might be conveyed.

The maidens of the Chorus have no sooner begun their conversation on the subject of the glories of the Trojan expedition (or "ode") than Electra retires into the house after saluting the girls graciously.

Chorus. Oh, glorious ships, that once with innumerable oars embarked for Troy, leading the dances of the Nereids where leaps the dolphin, lover of the flute, encircling the prows with its dark fins, and escorting Achilles, son of Thetis, light of leap afoot, together with Agamemnon to the Trojan banks of the Simois! (Dolphins loved the notes of lutes.)

The young lady who sings these lines intends to compliment Electra upon the glory of her father, Agamemnon, the character and the conduct of Electra being founded upon her devotion to her father's memory. The other girls take up the theme.

The Nereids (sea nymphs, daughters of Nereus) having abandoned the Euboeian shores, bore from the golden anvil of Vulcan the shield and the arms—works of the god—up the slopes

of Pelion, up the slopes of Ossa covered with forests holy, lofty retreats of the nymphs. (*The legend is that the nymphs, the Nereids, emerged from the sea to help Thetis, their sister, who was the mother of Achilles. Thetis went to Vulcan and implored him to make arms and a shield for her son. He did so. The nymphs took these things to Achilles. Thetis went with them.*)

There a knightly father trained the light of Greece, the sea-born son of Thetis, for the sake of the sons of Atreus (Agamemnon and his family), the hero swift of foot.

The allusion will be better understood if we recall Homer's remark. The arms in question, he says, were a present from a god to a mortal and were celebrated in the region that witnessed the birth of Achilles, amid the slopes of Pelion and Ossa where dwelt Peleus, father of Achilles.

Another maiden takes up the strain.

I heard someone coming from Ilion to the famed Nauplian harbor say that on the round surface of your glorious shield, oh son of Thetis, were forged emblems dire to the Trojans.

On the outer edge of the circle of the shield was shown Perseus with Mercury, the messenger of Jove, proud son of Maia, Perseus

borne above the briny seas by those winged talons at his feet and bearing the Gorgon's severed head on high. (Or, the Gorgon shape, severed at the neck.) *(This refers to the head of Medusa. She was one of the three Gorgons. Perseus cut off her head, being helped directly by the gods. Pluto lent Perseus a helmet that made the wearer invisible. Minerva loaned Perseus a shield. Mercury loaned him the winged feet and a jewelled sword.)*

In the middle of that shield gleamed the radiant orb of the sun transported by winged horses as well as by the ethereal dancing procession of the stars, the Pleiades and the Hyades, so terrible to the eyes of Hector. *(The Hyades were nymphs forming a constellation which sometimes rose with the sun to announce the weather. On earth, the Hyades were the nurses of Bacchus with whom they fled to Thebes and were rewarded by promotion to the rank of stars. The Pleiades were sisters to the Hyades and being pursued by the hunter Orion were turned at their entreaty into a constellation. One of the Pleiades became invisible from shame at having fallen in love with a man but the rest could be seen in the sky. The shield of Achilles with all these things and more elaborated upon it, is said by some poets to*

have explained the sudden flight of Hector when he had his famous encounter with Achilles outside the walls of Troy.)

On the helmet adorned with golden shapes were Sphinxes having in their claws the victim their songs had lured. (*Greek Sphynxes must not be confused with Egyptian Sphynxes. The Sphynx referred to was the monster that devoured all Thebans who could not answer its riddle.*)

On the edges of the rim of the shield was shown a swift race—a lioness vomiting flames trying to seize with its talons the Peirene steed. (*Pegasus was called the Peirene steed because when that winged horse was drinking at the Peirene fount Bellerophon caught it to help him in the fight against the Chimera—the lioness referred to here. The Chimera or Chimaera was not all lioness. In the rear she was a dragon and in the middle a goat and she had three heads. When she had been overcome by Bellerophon she was established at the entrance of Orcus, or Hades.*)

On the dire lance (*of Achilles*) were shown horses leaping by fours while a black cloud of dust reared itself about their backs. It was the chief of men who bore such lances that the daughter of Tyndarus (*or Tyndareus*)

woman of wicked ways, slew — and he her spouse. (*Clytemnestra was this woman and Agamemnon her husband.*) And the day will come when the gods shall send death to you (*Clytemnestra*) and I shall yet see the blood shed by lance flow down your gory neck.

ACT III.

The rising sun, in its progress upward, has brought into clear relief against a deep blue sky the outlines of the farmer's cottage and the pleasing description of the prospect all about it. The trees and the bushes show evidence of the approach of their fruit to maturity. The sounds and sights of farm life are everywhere.

The sound of approaching footsteps along the road is heard at the right. The accents of the human voice grow distinct and a few rustics in the garb of shepherds stroll along the palings that fence off the abode of the Husbandman. At last an old man, leaning upon a staff, enters tardily. He looks about him. His garb is the flowing smock of the Greek cultivator.

Old Man. Where, oh where is that distinguished young girl, my mistress, whom in time past I fed? The child of Agamemnon! How difficult is the approach to this abode to the feet of an old man all wrinkled! And yet, for the sake of serving one's friends, one must drag in their direction a bent back and a lag-gard knee. (*Electra appears suddenly at the*

front door.) Oh, my daughter, for I see you now in front of the place, I bring you this new-fledged thing, this young lamb chosen from the flock in my meadows, and cabbages and cheeses and garlands of flowers as well as some of my ancient treasure from my hoard of Bacchus, sending forth its sweet perfume, a little to be sure, yet agreeable to pour into a wine less powerful. (*The Old Man indicates with a gesture the rustics who accompany him who prove, in effect, to be laden with the delicacies referred to. He addresses his next words to them.*) Somebody take those things to the strangers inside the house. As for me, with the rags and tatters of my garments I will wipe my eyes, wet with tears. (*He wipes his face with every aspect of complete weariness.*)

Electra. And why, Old Man, is that eye of yours so wet? Can it be that my woes have come back to your memory after this long time? Or are you weeping because of the woful exile of Orestes and on account of my father, whom you once held by the hand and reared in vain both on your own account and that of your friends?

Old Man. In vain! And that is the very thing I have not been able to endure. I went to his tomb on my way here and falling down

I wept, for it chanced to be a lonely spot then and having loosed the wine skin I was bringing to the guests here I poured forth libations. I placed myrtle branches about the tomb. On the very pyre itself I saw a black sheep, slain with a cut through the fleece and there was blood not long shed and curls cut from a blonde head. I wondered, my child, what man among mortals had dared to come to the tomb. Certainly not one of the Argives. Perhaps somehow your brother went by stealth, and being there he did honor to the mournful tomb of his father. (*The Old Man produces a lock of hair*). Look at this curl and compare it with your own hair to see if its color is not that of the shorn lock. It is usual that most things of the body are by birth similar among those who are of the same blood through a father.

Electra. Old man, you say things unworthy of a sage if you believe that my brave brother could come in secret back to this land because of fear of Aegisthus. (*She takes the lock of hair*). And then how could this lock of hair be like mine? One waxed coarse in the gymnastic field from exercises suitable to a well born man and the woman's hair (*touching her own forehead with the lock*) is made fine with the comb. It is impossible. You will find, old

man, many locks of hair alike in many people even if they be not born of the same blood.

Old Man. But you, by walking in the marks of the footprints, examine the tracks left by his sandal to see if it does not measure the same as your foot, my child.

Electra. How could the print of feet be left on stony ground? Even if it were, the feet of brother and of sister would not be alike in size for that of the man would prove greatest.

Old Man. If your brother were here now, would you not recognize the material woven of your own loom and shuttle that he wore when I rescued him from death?

Electra. Don't you know how young I was when Orestes was driven from the land? And even if I did weave his garment then how, seeing that he was then but a boy, would he now be wearing the same clothes, unless clothing grows upon the body?—But some stranger, taking pity on the tomb, cut off his lock or perhaps it was some resident of this very land who escaped the eyes of the spies. (*She examines the lock of hair in her hand again.*)

Old Man. These strangers—where are they? I should like to ask them about your brother, if I might see them.

At that moment, Orestes emerges from the house. He has paid some attention to the de-

tails of his personal appearance, for his hair is nicely combed and his garments have been brushed. Pylades follows at a short distance, he, too, having been dusted and brushed.

Electra. Here they come swift-footed from the house.

Old Man. Well born, at any rate. Yet that may be mere appearance. And many who are well born are vicious. However, I make my salutations to the strangers. (*The Old Man bows low to both youths*)

Orestes. Hail, old man! (*The Old Man fixes his gaze intently upon Orestes*). Which of your friends, Electra (*he speaks in an undertone to his sister*) is this ancient relic of a man?

Electra (*we must remember that she does not know who Orestes really is*). This man, oh stranger, brought up my father.

Orestes. (*He is amazed*) What do you say? Then this is he who saved your brother?

Electra. He it is who saved him (*Orestes*) if indeed he yet lives.

Orestes. Ha! Why does he stare at me, studying me as if I were a device on a bright piece of money? Do I look like somebody or other?

Electra. Perhaps he is pleased to find you of the same age as Orestes.

The Old Man turns about and walks around Orestes with a manifest keenness of scrutiny.

Orestes. A man very dear to me. (*He is referring to Orestes*). But why does he walk around me thus?

Electra. I myself, stranger, seeing this, am amazed.

The Old Man throws his hands upward and then claps them together and dances with delight.

Old Man. Oh, Electra, noble daughter, give thanks to the gods! (*She stands dumfounded*).

Electra. For things absent or for things present?

Old Man. (*He cavorts.*) For getting the precious treasure that the gods bestow.

Electra (*in prayerful attitude*). Behold, I call upon the gods. But what are you saying, old man?

Old Man. Gaze upon this beloved object, my child. (*He indicates Orestes and then goes on cavorting about the place.*)

Electra. For some time now I have feared that you were not in your right mind.

Old Man. (*He seems breathless and halts*). I not in my right mind when I'm looking at your brother?

(*Orestes starts and looks confused. Pylades also starts and looks troubled. Electra gazes*

from Orestes to Pylades once or twice and then fixes her gaze upon the old man.)

Electra. How can you say such an extraordinary thing, old man?

Old Man. I see Orestes, the son of Agamemnon.

(Once more the Old Man cavorts, but not quite so vigorously.)

Electra. What mark of identification did you see by which I might be convinced?

Old Man. A scar on the eyebrow where he was sorely wounded once from falling while following with you a fawn in the grounds of his father.

Electra. What do you say? I see indeed the mark left by his fall.

She is visibly agitated while Orestes stands in confusion and Pylades hides his face. The Old Man throws up his hands.

Old Man. And you shrink from throwing yourself into the arms of your dearest beloved?

Electra. *(She flings her arms around the neck of Orestes.)* I hesitate no longer, old man *(She hides her face on the shoulder of Orestes).* You have appeared at last and I have you in the face of all hope, against all I looked for.

The Old Man leaps and clasps his hands. Pylades executes a dance. The members of the Chorus show some tendency to weep.

Orestes. I hold you at last!

Electra. I never thought—(*She stops overwhelmed and buries her face again upon the shoulder of Orestes.*)

Orestes. And I never hoped.

Electra. (*She lifts her head and gazes long into the face of Orestes.*) And you are really he?

Orestes. The only ally you have—that is if I can with full assurance deal the blow I meditate. I hope so. Either we must infer that the gods hold sway or that injustice will prevail over the right.

•*The Old Man exchanges a salute with Pylades and the girls in the chorus clap their hands and sing.*

Chorus. You have arrived, you have arrived, oh, tardy day! You have flashed upon the city this gleaming brilliant (*Orestes*) who wandering miserably in a long flight far from his father's house has come back at last. Some god, some god, has brought us our triumph, dearest. Lift your hands, lift your voice, send your prayers to the gods so that your brother may enter his native city happily for you, happily!

The girls dance and dance.

Orestes. Good! (*He lifts the head of Electra from his shoulder tenderly.*) I have the dear

delight of our kisses and we shall have others in due time. (*He quits his sister's side to talk with the old man, now leaning against the palings*). Now you, old man, for you have come in good season, tell me what I am to do to punish the murderer of my father and what about my mother, who shares the iniquity of this marriage? Are there any well disposed friends of mine in Argos? Or am I ruined utterly like my fortunes? With whom could I foregather by night or in the daytime? Along what path can I turn against my foes?

Old Man. Son, no one is a friend to you, in misfortune. It is indeed a rare thing to find one who will share with you in both good and evil fortune. For you—since you are utterly ruined in the eyes of your friends—and you have no hope left—understand this well and listen to me. In your own hand and in your own luck is comprised all now left you with which to capture your father's palace and his city.

Orestes. What things must I do to attain this object?

Old Man. You must slay the son of Thyestes (*Aegisthus, new husband of Clytemnestra*) and your mother.

Orestes. I'll seize the palm of that victory, but how?

Old Man. Even by entering the walls, you could not if you would.

Orestes. They are equipped with defenses and with the hands of spear bearers?

Old Man. You are right—he is afraid of you, evidently, and he does not even sleep. (*The allusion is to Aegisthus, paramour of Clytemnestra*).

Orestes. Very well—then you, old man, advise what next.

Old Man. Then listen to me—for something has just occurred to me.

Orestes. I hope you suggest something good and that I understand it.

Old Man. I saw Aegisthus when I arrived here.

Orestes. I grasp what you say. In what place?

Old Man. Near these fields—where the horse pasture is.

Orestes. What doing? I see a gleam of hope out of my helplessness.

Old Man. He prepared a festival for the nymphs as it seemed to me.

Orestes. For the sake of the children he has or for the sake of one yet unborn?

Old Man. I don't know—except one point—he was preparing a sacrifice of the bulls.

Orestes. With how many men? Or was it with his servants only?

Old Man. No Argive was there: only the domestic force. (*Or, only his own servants.*)

Orestes. Was anyone there who would know me if he saw me, old man?

Old Man. They are servants who certainly never saw you.

Orestes. Are there any favorable to us in case we prevailed?

Old Man. That tendency is peculiar to slaves and is an advantage to you.

Orestes. Then how shall I get near him?

Old Man. If you go to the bull sacrifice, he'll see you.

Orestes. He is in the fields, it seems, near the road itself.

Old Man. From which, if he sees you, he will hail you to share the feast.

Orestes. A fatal guest, if the gods are favorable (*to me.*)

Old Man. You will devise what next according to circumstances.

Orestes. You say justly. And where is she who bore me? (*Clytemnestra.*)

Old Man. At Argos—soon she will be at the feast.

Orestes. Why does my mother not go out with her husband?

Old Man. She is absent because she dreads the censure of the people.

Orestes. I understand—she knows that she is suspected in the city.

Old Man. Exactly. An impure woman is loathed.

Orestes. How shall I slay her and him at the same time?

Electra suddenly emerges from the seeming trance in which she has followed the course of this colloquy. She stamps her foot, clenches a fist and speaks with vehemence.

Electra. I will plan the murder of my mother.

Orestes (with equal vehemence). And surely fortune will dispose these things to advantage. (Or, destiny will surely work it all out well.)

Electra. Occasion will serve us, we being two.

Old Man. Be it so. But how will you contrive the slaughter of your mother?

Electra. Old Man, you go and announce to Clytemnestra—(she hesitates).

Old Man. (He stares and starts as if expecting a prodigious announcement).

Electra. —tell her that I am in childbed with a baby boy.

Old Man. Shall I say you bore the babe some time ago or just now?

Electra. Say that suns enough have shone for my purification. (Or, tell her the number of suns—days passed since the birth of the child—in which a woman in childbed becomes purified.)

(Women in childbed required a ritualistic purification before they could participate in religious ceremonies again.)

Old Man. And how would that facilitate the death of your mother?

Electra. She will come when she hears of my illness in childbed.

Old Man. Why? Does it seem to you, child, that she is worried about you?

Electra. Yes—and she will weep for the state of my children.

Old Man. Perhaps. But let us bring our talk back to the point.

Electra. Being come, then, obviously, she will perish.

Old Man. Then may she pass under the portals of your home?

Electra. It will be easy to turn them into the portals of Hades.

Old Man. May I die having seen that!

Electra. First of all, be a guide to him, old man (indicating *Orestes*).

Old Man. To where Aegisthus is now sacrificing to the gods?

Electra. Next go to my mother and give her my message.

Old Man. Just as if she heard the words spoken by your own mouth!

Electra. Your move has come (to Orestes). Fate has allotted the first killing to you.

Orestes. I will go at once if someone will guide me along the way.

Old Man. I will guide you gladly.

Orestes. Oh, Jove of our fathers, and scourge of our foes, have pity upon us—for we have suffered things calling for pity!

Electra. (Kneeling with suppliant hands). Have pity on your descendants! (She and her brother were descended from Tantalus, reputed son of Jove.)

Jove was hailed as father, however, by most Greeks.

Orestes (sinking upon one knee). And Juno, ruling the altars of the Mycenaeans, give us victory if we ask for what is just!

Electra. Yes, give them their just punishment to avenge my father.

The Old Man holds himself in an attitude of reverence with hands extended towards the sun. In the heroic age of Greece prayers to the dead and for them and invocations to the Earth were offered with hands outstretched to the sun.

Orestes. And you, oh my father, dwelling beneath the earth in unhallowed durance—and you Earth, our Queen, to whom I stretch out my hands—help, defend these precious children of his (*Agamemnon's*). Come now, with all who are dead for allies, those who destroyed with you the Trojans with the lance, and all who loathe impious slayers. You have heard us (*this to the shade of Agamemnon*), oh sufferer of what is monstrous at the hands of my mother?

Pylades is seen in the background kneeling with hands outstretched.

Electra. (*She rises suddenly.*) My father hears all this, I know. But it is time to be up and doing. For that reason let me tell you that Aegisthus must die. If in the fight, you fall with a mortal wound received from him (*Aegisthus*) then I will die. Bid me not live. For I will strike my own head through with a two-edged sword. I will go within the house to make all things ready and if good news arrives about you, the whole place will cry aloud with delight. If you die, the exact reverse will happen. These things I tell you myself. (*She places an arm around his neck and looks pleadingly into his face.*)

Orestes (*beckoning to Pylades*). I understand all.

Electra. (She places another arm about the neck of Orestes and speaks to him more beseechingly.) For these reasons, you must be a man. (There is agitation among the attentive young ladies of the Chorus to whom *Electra* now turns.) And you, ladies, keep me posted regarding the uproar of the fight to come. I will myself be on guard too with ready sword—for never shall I, defeated, afford to my foes the satisfaction of outraging my body.

Orestes hurries from the scene with Pylades, their suite and the Old Man. Electra looks after them for a considerable time.

Chorus. In the tales of old there still remains the tradition that Pan, guardian of the fields, breathing the sweetest of songs through exquisite lutes led one day from the Argive heights a lamb, of golden fleece, clinging to the bosom of its mother, so tender. The herald then, standing forth upon the steps of stone, cried aloud: "To the assembly, go to the assembly, Mycenaeans, there to behold marvels, the grim prodigies of our blessed sovereigns." The dancing singers made gay the halls of the Atreidae.

The Atreidae—the house of Atreus—were the descendants of that Atreus who, like Thyestes,

was a son of Pelops. Atreus succeeded Pelops as king and married the daughter of Pelops. Thyestes wronged the wife of Atreus. Atreus revenged himself by serving a banquet at which Thyestes unwittingly ate the flesh of his own children. Thereupon Thyestes cursed the house of Atreus, whose sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus, wedded Clytemnestra and Helen respectively. Aegisthus, paramour of Clytemnestra, was the youngest son of the Thyestes who cursed the house of Atreus.

And the temples inlaid with gold were open and fire burned on the altars of the Argives and made the city bright. The lute, minister of the Muses, made its sweet note sound forth and there were songs of love in honor of the golden lamb of Thyestes. For, having seduced the beloved spouse of Atreus into a secret union, he bore the prodigy to his palatial halls. (*Aerope, wife of Atreus, gave up to Thyestes, her seducer, the lamb, possession of which carried with it sovereignty at Mycenae. Mycenae and Argos, both in the valley of Argolis, are quite near together.*)

Going into the assembly, he exclaimed that he had the horned sheep with the golden fleece at home.

Then it was that Love changed the flaming

paths of the stars and the flash of the sun and the pale face of the morning. The sun dashed towards the fields of the west with its furious flame divinely afire.

The clouds burdened with water flew to the Arctic and the shore of the Ammonites (Libya), wasted in their dryness from lack of the dew, deprived by Jove of the beautiful rains.

So they say. To me this is a theme of little faith—the idea that the god turned back the sun, changing the path of its car, golden-fronted, for a mere mortal's misfortune and for the sake of a mortal retribution.

These dire tales are good for mortals since they tend to regard for the gods, forgetful of whom you slay your spouse, oh mother of a glorious brother and sister!

The maidens of the Chorus are really discussing the approaching tragedy as discreetly as possible. We are not to assume that these lines are a unified "ode" rather than a dialogue, for then it would all be irrelevant. The maidens, waiting upon events, pass the time in talking and this brings us to the end of what, in the great Glasgow edition of Euripides, is the "third act." The text here is in some confusion and the word "Arctic" above might

have been more adequately rendered by the word "bear" — the constellation. Some versions have it that the allusion to the "mother of a glorious brother and sister" is in reality to the "sister of two immortal brothers," Clytemnestra being a sister to Castor and Pollux.

ACT IV.

The young ladies forming the Chorus are still waiting upon events in the grounds outside the cottage when a tremendous uproar is heard some distance off. The maidens all rush together in a panic while the din rises higher. The heads of some servants are thrust out of the windows of the farm house in eager curiosity.

Chorus. Ah! Ah! Did you hear that cry? It was like the thunder of the god of those below.

I think I must be misled—

Listen—voices not unintelligible are lifted.

(The din intensifies.)

Electra rushes wildly out of the cottage and her attitude suggests that she means to speak when a fresh uproar checks her and she stands motionless.

Electra, our lady, has come forth.

Electra. What is the matter, my friends? What stage of the fight have we reached?
(Yells without.)

Chorus. I don't know—except one thing. I hear a shriek of murder.

Electra. I heard it too, far off, to be sure but clearly. (*Yells outside.*)

Chorus. This outcry comes from a distance and yet it is distinct.

Electra. Is this shrieking that of an Argive or is it that of our friends?

Chorus. I don't know. The cries are so mixed and so confused.

Electra. You remind me of the killing I must do. (*She lifts the sword she has brought out with her as if she would slay herself.*) What are we to do?

Some versions render this speech as if Electra told the girls that their cries made the murder echo from their ears into her own.

Chorus. Stop! Be patient so that you may learn clearly what your own fate is to be.

Electra. That can not be—we are defeated. (*She makes a violent gesture of her hand with the sword but she desists.*) From whom come these messengers?

A youth rushes in breathlessly, two companions with him. The youth is referred to below as the Messenger. He is one of the retinue who came with Orestes and Pylades and later departed with them.

Chorus. They will come! It is no slight thing to slay a king.

Messenger. Oh, maidens of Mycenae, flushed with victory, I announce Orestes as the victor with all his friends—and Aegisthus, the slayer of Agamemnon, is prostrate on the ground. Now must we offer prayers to the gods.

Electra. But who are you? You, I mean. How can you announce to me such things as worthy of belief?

Messenger. Don't you know, as you look at me, that I am a servant of your brother's?

Electra. Dearest friend, from terror, I found it not easy to recall your face. Now I recognize you. What is it you say? The hateful murderer of my father is dead?

Messenger. He has died—I tell you that twice now since you so wish it.

Chorus. Oh, ye gods, and you, Justice, the all-seeing, you have arrived at last!

Electra. I would like to learn how and by what mode of execution the son of Thyestes was slain.

Messenger. After we had set foot outside of these domains, we went into a carriage road at a double pace to where the illustrious prince of the Mycenaeans was found. He was promenading in his well watered gardens, gathering garlands of myrtle for his head.

Seeing us, he cried:

"Hail, guests! Who are you? Where do you come from and of what country are you?"

And Orestes answered:

"Thessalians—and we are going to sacrifice to Jupiter of Olympus by the banks of the Alphaeus."

And Aegisthus retorted: — upon hearing these things:

"Now you must stay with us and share our festival with me. I am sacrificing bulls to the nymphs. Since you may rise early from your beds, in the morning, it will make no difference. But let us go into my house."

Thus he spoke as he took us by the hand and led us and made it unbecoming to refuse. After we were inside the house, he said these things:

"Let someone bring as speedily as possible baths for our guests so that they may stand about the altar near the lustral waters."

But Orestes interposed:

"We purified ourselves just now with clean baths from the river flow. Yet if it be proper that foreigners sacrifice with natives, Aegisthus, we are ready, Prince, and we shall not decline."

They stopped therefore in the middle of their talk. The slaves laid aside the lances,

the defenses of their masters, all took part in the work. Some brought forward the slaughtered offering, others lifted the basins and others lit the fire about the hearth and bore the warming pans through the hall. Then the husband of your mother seized the holy grain and scattered it about the altars, pronouncing these words:

"Nymphs, dwellers among the rocks, I and my spouse, daughter of Tyndareus who dwell within these palaces, sacrifice many a bull to you, prospering since our foes are in woe."

Thus he referred to you and to Orestes. But my master prayed the exact opposite, that he might retake the paternal palace halls and yet not speaking aloud his wish. Then Aegisthus, having drawn from the basket a sharp knife, cut the hairs of the victim to be sacrificed and with his right hand placed the offering upon the sacred fire. When the slaves had with their hands lifted the young cow, he struck it on the shoulders speaking thus to your brother:

"Among the accomplishments of which they say the Thessalians boast is that of being able to cut up a bull skilfully and master a horse. Take this metal edge, stranger, and show how justified is the renown of the Thessalians."

He (*Orestes*) seizing in his hand the Dorian weapon, well tempered as it was, and dropping from his shoulder his exquisite cloak, chose Pylades as an assistant in the task and motioned the slaves back. Having seized the foot of the heifer he laid bare all its white flesh with a forward motion of his hand. He stripped it of its hide more swiftly than a runner could travel the double course of the stadium on a horse and he exposed the entrails to the light.

Now Aegisthus had taken the sacred parts into his own hands and studied them. The lobe of the liver was lacking in the intestines. The veins and the vessels conducting the bile foretold disaster to those who scrutinized them. His face wore a frown and my master put him a question:

"Why are you disconcerted?"

"Oh, stranger, I fear some trickery outside. The son of Agamemnon, most hateful of mankind, and enemy of my house!"

He (*Orestes*) thereupon replied:

"Ruling the city, you yet fear some trick played by the exile. Will not someone bring to me the Phthian knife in place of the Doric edge so that I may transfix the chest and thus let us celebrate the sacrificial festival?"

The Phthian knife—a Thessalian weapon—was a curved blade and much stronger than one with a Doric edge. The ceremony was the so-called sacrifice of exploration, to explore the intestines of the animal and thus ascertain the will of the gods.

Seizing the victim, he struck it. Aegisthus, handling the entrails, studied them as he lifted them up. While he bent over, your brother, standing on tip-toe, struck him in the spine and shattered the vertebrae. The whole body shivered up and down and collapsed, dying in the agony of slaughter. The slaves, beholding these things, rushed for their lances, they being many to fight against two. Pylades and Orestes, through their courage, stood firm, flourishing their dagger points. Then Orestes said:

"I do not come in hostility to this town ⁱⁿ ^{at} nor as a foe to my comrades. I have but avenged myself, I the suffering Orestes, upon the murderer of my father. And you, the old servitors of my father, do not slay me."

They, when they had heard this speech, withheld their weapons. He was recognized by an old man who had long served within the palace. Delighted, and uttering cries of joy. They wreathed with garlands there and then the

head of your brother. He is coming now bringing to you not the head of the Gorgon but that of Aegisthus, whom you hold in horror, thus blood takes a dire toll of blood from him who is now dead.

The girls of the Chorus begin a dance in which Electra does not take part.

Chorus. Put our footsteps into the dance, dear friend, like a fawn lifting lightly its gambolling limbs with delight. Your brother has triumphed, having achieved things greater than a crowned victory beside the banks of the Alpheian waters (*meaning at Olympia*). Give voice in unison with my dance in a triumphal paean.

Electra. Oh light, oh flash of the four-horsed chariot of the sun, oh earth and night that I saw before (*the night of her sorrow*) now my eye and my glance are free, since Aegisthus, the murderer of my father, is slain! Whatever I have as garlands for my hair and whatever treasures my home may have hidden within, these let me bring forth, my friends, to crown the head of my victorious brother.

Chorus. Seek ornaments for his brow while our dances proceed gloriously for the honor of the Muses. (*Electra hurries within the house.*)

Now our kings so beloved of us, they who held sway of old, will rule the land, having driven the usurper forth. Let a cry in tune with our delight be sent to the sky.

A clamor is heard without while the dance of the chorus proceeds. Members of the retinue of Orestes emerge into the road from the right. Some come next who bear a bier on which is the body of Aegisthus partly hidden beneath the folds of a cloak. Pylades appears behind the bier with a sword. Last comes Orestes carrying the head of Aegisthus by its hair. The dance of the Chorus attains a stage of Bacchanalian frenzy until Electra issues forth from the house. She has attired herself in a bright purple cloak. Upon her head is a fillet of flowers and upon her right arm, as if it were a bracelet, depends a wreath of roses and bay leaves. In her right hand she carries another wreath.

Electra. Illustrious victor begotten by a victorious father (she makes a gesture to Orestes) oh, Orestes, son of the victor in the fight beneath the walls of Troy (Agamemnon was commander-in-chief there), receive these laurels on your head! You come home to us not having indeed run a race of six plethra to no purpose but after despatching our foe, Aegisthus. (*The*

plethra or plethron equalled just over a hundred feet. Six plethrons formed a "stade." Around this distance were turned the chariots in the Olympic games.) And you, oh Pylades, his comrade in peril, son of a most worthy man, receive from my own hand this crown. (*They kneel to receive the emblems and Electra proceeds.*) You bear likewise a share in the struggle equal to his (*indicating Orestes*). May you present yourself to me always in good fortune.

The young men arise.

Orestes. Electra, believe in the first place that the gods are the workers of this good fortune. Then praise me as well as the instrument of the gods and of fortune. I come, having slain Aegisthus, not with words but with deeds. That we may afford evidence of these things to actual sight, I bring you the dead man himself. Let him be thrown, if you like, to the wild beasts in their lairs and to the birds of prey, children of the air, for he who so lately called himself your master is now your slave.

(*He throws the head of Aegisthus upon the bier.*)

Electra (*falteringly*). I am ashamed, indeed, and yet I would like to say—

Orestes. What? Speak since you are freed from fear.

Electra. —I am afraid to outrage the dead lest someone criticise me.

Orestes. No one would blame you for it.

Electra. Yet our town is difficult to please and fond of censure.

Orestes. Speak, sister, if you want anything. We have both felt for him (*indicating the head of Aegisthus*) a hatred amenable to no laws.

Electra. (*As she speaks she advances to the bier and addresses herself to the head of Aegisthus.*) Good! With what preface to my reproaches shall I begin to speak to you and how shall I tell the end? What words shall be the middle of my discourse? Day by day when the dawn appeared, I would ponder the charges I might hurl into your teeth if ever the hour came when I should be freed from the dreads that held me before. Now I am freed. I will give you the words of woe I would have wished to speak to you while yet you lived. (*She waves her arms wildly and tosses her hair and advances to the head upon the bier.*) You destroyed me and you made me an orphan and bereft this youth (*pointing to Orestes*) of a dear father and yet neither of us had done you wrong. In shame and in-

famy you espoused our mother and you slew the hero who commanded the Greeks, you yourself not having marched against the Phrygians. (*A somewhat contemptuous word when applied by a Greek to a Trojan.*) And you went to such an extent of folly that you thought our vile mother would never oppose you in anything and so you dishonored the marriage bed of my father. He who has ruined the wife of another through an adulterous connection and is then forced to take her for his own wife is miserable indeed if he thinks that after having failed in chastity to one she will be chaste and faithful to another. (*This celebrated passage in the no less celebrated speech of Electra to the severed head is variously rendered but the meaning is the same. One editor translates: "let him know that when anyone, after having corrupted the wife of another, is later forced to take her himself, he is unfortunate" and so forth.*) You dwelt in woe, not thinking you dwelt infamously. You knew, having entered into unholy wedlock, what you did, and so did my mother, for she knew she had possessed herself of a wicked, impious man. The two of you being evil, you drew your woe upon you, she bringing on your own and you bringing down hers. These things you heard everywhere repeated by all the Argives—he, they

said, is the woman's, not: the wife is the husband's. It is indeed disgraceful that the wife should be the head of the house and not the husband. I despise too those children who are known in a town not by the name of the father but by that of the mother. (*It was a suggestion of illegitimacy.*) For he who has won a marriage bed that is renowned and of greater fame than he has himself finds that no store is set by the man but all is reckoned through the female. (*A more intelligible version would be: By allying himself with a woman of superior birth to his own and of exalted social position, a man reduces himself to a nullity—the woman alone is regarded.*) Now that which most misled you, for you did not realize it, was that you only boasted of being somebody, amounting to something only because of the riches of another. Yet what is wealth? The most fleeting of friends. The nature of a man is alone permanent, not his wealth. For what is native to him is what overcomes his adversity but ill gotten wealth, when it enters into the treasure of the wicked, flies out of the house after flourishing the briefest while. As for what you were guilty of with women, I will not tell that, since it would not become a virgin to speak of such things, yet I shall indicate it in a manner intelligible enough. You

were arrogant as would be one having power in the royal palaces and deeming himself handsome. Yet I would have a husband of mine a man of manly nature and not a woman-faced weakling. For the children of a strong man are the sons of Mars but beautiful children are only ornaments in the dance. Die, cowardly scoundrel, you who could not foresee the penalty you would have to pay at my demand some day. (*She shakes her arm with a flourish at the dead head on the bier and addresses her next words to the chorus and the rest.*) Let not him who has run luckily the first length of the stadium think he will win the race against justice until he arrives near the line of the goal and he has come to the end of his course.

Chorus. He worked wickedness. Yet has he given due expiation to you and to him (*Orestes*). Justice has tremendous might.

Orestes. Be it so. But the body of this fellow must be taken inside, followers, so that when my mother comes, she may not behold the dead before she is slaughtered herself.

The bier is borne within the house by the retinue led by Pylades.

Electra. Be cautious. Let us be absorbed in some other topic.

Orestes. What's the matter? Can it be that you see men running here from Mycenae?

Electra. No—but I see the woman who bore me.

There is a display of agitation among the maidens of the Chorus. The head of Pylades thrust through a window expresses a lively interest. Someone is obviously coming along the road.

Orestes. She comes just in time to get into the toils.

Electra. She is certainly well set up in her chariot and her clothes.

(Electra looks eagerly up the road from which a sound of voices and of horses proceeds.)

Orestes. Now what are we to do? Shall we really slay our mother?

Electra. Has pity actually seized you because you see the beauty of your mother?

Orestes. Ah! How shall I slay her—she who bore me and nursed me?

Electra. Just as she slew your father and mine.

Orestes. Oh, Apollo! you issued a senseless oracle.

Electra. Yet when Apollo is senseless, who is wise?

Orestes. He whose oracle was to the effect

that I slay my mother said what he ought not. (Or, thou, who dost warn me to slay—what I should not do—my own mother!)

Electra. Yet avenging your own father, whom do you wrong?

Orestes. I will fly a parricide, I who was innocent until that guilt.

Electra. And still, by not vindicating your father, you will be impious.

Orestes. But I will work retribution upon my mother for the murder.

Electra. To whom will you pay the penalty for not having avenged your father?

Orestes. May not some evil genius in the likeness of a god have spoken to me?

Electra. Seated upon the sacred tripod? (*The prophetic seat of the oracle of Apollo*). I, at any rate, will not believe that.

Orestes. Yet I will not believe either that this was advised by an oracle.

Electra. You will not fall into cowardice, from weakness?

Her eyes flash as she speaks almost threateningly to her brother.

Orestes. And am I to prepare for her the same trick?

Electra. The very one by which you overcame Aegisthus, her husband.

Orestes. I will go inside. I am at the be-

ginning of a tremendous undertaking and I will do tremendous deeds before it is accomplished. If these things seem good to the gods, well! Yet the task is both bitter and sweet to me.

Orestes hastens within the house and Pylades disappears from the window out of which he looked. The voices of approaching people are louder and the retinue of Clytemnestra emerges from the right. A small group of runners, attired as Greek slaves in short tunics, comes first. Next appear three female runners who are likewise slaves. Finally appears the chariot drawn by two horses tandem. The driver stands up behind while Clytemnestra occupies a seat at the right hand side of the vehicle. After the chariot walk a number of grooms. The heads of the horses are held by grooms.

Clytemnestra is a middle-aged woman of extreme distinction of aspect. Her tall form is closely sheathed in a white robe folded about her figure and leaving the limbs free. She wears laced buskins in gold filigree. Her head is surmounted by a coronet of lilies and her hair is done in a Psyche knot at the back of her head. Her arms are bare but the cloak of blue silk thrown over one shoulder makes the effect one of chastity and cold delicacy.

She looks about her with some disdain, especially when she glances at the gray gowns of the war captives who are part of her elaborate retinue. As the chariot reaches the front of the house, the maidens of the chorus salute Clytemnestra with a series of the most profound obeisances.

Chorus. Hail, royal lady of the Argive land and daughter of Tyndareus and sister of the two valiant brothers, begotten of Jove, who dwell among the flaming stars in the lumeniferous ether and whom mortals honor on the briny deep as saving divinities! (Castor and Pollux, the twins, are referred to. They were children of Leda, wife of Tyndareus, begotten of Jove. Jove, in the form of a man, took refuge from the pursuit of an eagle in the bosom of Leda. She brought forth two eggs, from one of which issued Castor and Clytemnestra, mortals, and from the other Pollux and Helen, the latter immortal because begotten by Jove.) Hail! I revere you and the blessed gods alike for your great riches and your great felicity. Oh, queen, it is indeed timely to do homage to your destiny!

As the words are uttered, Clytemnestra stands up and makes a signal to the captive Trojan women in the chariot with her, who are her slaves.

Clytemnestra. Get down from the car, Trojans, and take my hand so that I may set my foot outside it. (*As she is obeyed, she steps delicately forth upon a rug laid for her feet. Wherever Clytemnestra goes, the Trojan slave women spread tapestries or rugs or carpet to save her feet from contact with the unconsecrated ground*). The temples of the gods these women, chosen from the prizes of the Phrygians. As for me, I have in my home these women, chosen from the prides of the Trojan city, a trivial booty and yet worthy.

Electra (*she comes slowly forth*). May I not take your blessed hand, mother, myself? I do indeed dwell in a wretched hovel, having been chased out as a slave from the home of my fathers.

Clytemnestra. These slaves are here—do not trouble yourself on my account.

Electra. Why is that? You have thrust me as a captive from my home and since my home is thus a prey I too am like these (*she indicates the Trojan slave women*) for I am bereft of my father.

Clytemnestra. That is the result of the evil designs formed by your father against those whom he should not have dealt with in any such fashion. I will speak without evasion, although when a woman is hounded

with an evil name, a certain bitterness is in her language and there is a prejudice against her. Not that this is just, or so it seems to me, for it would be just to look into the actual facts and to hate only what is worthy of hate. Otherwise, why detest anyone? (*Clytemnestra has descended from the chariot and as the Trojan captives adjust the details of her attire, she continues to scold Electra*).

When Tyndareus united me with your father it was not for the purpose of handing me over to death nor those either whom I was to bear. But he (*Agamemnon*) having led away my daughter upon the pretense of an engagement to marry her to Achilles, he left his home and took her (*Iphigenia*) to Aulis, where the ships were gathered. There, stretching her forth upon the pyre, he severed the white neck of Iphigenia. If he had done such a thing to avert the destruction of his native land or to save his family and the other children, if he had thus sacrificed one life to save many others, I might have forgiven a crime that was so imperative. But because Helen is without shame, and because he who took her as his wife did not know how to punish a traitress, for that reason, he slew my child.

For such reasons, however, although cruel-

ly maltreated, I did not fly into a passion nor would I have slain my husband had he not come home (*from Troy*) bringing with him a raving young woman inspired by a divine madness (*the prophetess Cassandra*) who shared his bed and thus he had two wives in the same house.

Women are indeed filled with folly and I do not pretend otherwise. This being so, it follows that when the husband sins and goes outside his marriage bed, the wife follows the example of the husband and takes another for a lover. Then the blame is placed upon us and the men, where these things are concerned, will not take any censure upon themselves.

Suppose Menelaus had been taken in secret from his home, would it have become my duty to kill Orestes so that I might save Menelaus the husband of my sister? How would your father have tolerated that? Was he who would slay my children not himself to die and was I to endure such things at his hands? I killed—I followed the course I had to take. I went over to his enemies. Which one of his friends, indeed, would have undertaken with me the murder of your father?

Speak—if you have anything to say. Do not be afraid to use freedom of speech in

urging that your father was not justly slain.

Electra. You have used arguments, you have urged your side of the case. But that case is disgraceful. For a woman should make every allowance for her husband if she be herself virtuous and she who does not adopt that point of view does not come within the scope of my words. Consider, mother, your last words, for they afford me occasion to speak without reserve to you.

Clytemnestra. I repeat what I said and I do not repudiate it, my child.

Electra. Having heard what I have to say, will you then do me harm, mother?

Clytemnestra. That will not happen. I will even say what will delight your heart.

Electra. I will then speak. And this is the preface to my words. I would to the gods, mother, that your heart cherished finer feelings. Your own form and features, and those of Helen too are worthy of eulogy. But the two of you were born vain and unworthy of Castor. One of you, being seduced, went off not unwillingly. (*The reference is to Helen of Troy—really Helen of Sparta—who eloped with Paris although she was the wife of Menelaus, brother to Agamemnon.*) And you destroyed the best man in all Greece and you put forth as a pretext that you caused the

slaughter of your husband on account of your child. Yet it was you—the world does not know this as well as I do—who before the immolation of your daughter (*Iphigenia at Aulis*) was decided upon, and when your husband had but recently left his home and yours, it was you who combed and beautified your blonde tresses before a mirror. Now the woman who adorns herself for the sake of enhancing her beauty when her husband is away sets herself down as wicked. For it is not possible that she should show herself outdoors with a face beautified unless she be looking for evil. And I know that you, alone among the women of Greece, were filled with joy when you heard that the fortunes of the Trojans were prospering and that your brow was clouded when they were in defeat. For you did not wish Agamemnon to return from Troy at all. And still it was easy enough for you to display the quality of virtue, it was incumbent upon you to be a good woman. You had for a husband a man not inferior to Aegisthus, one whom Greece had chosen as commander in her war. Since Helen your sister had proved so guilty, it was right that you should establish a reputation for purity, a great glory. For the wickedness of the evil affords a subject of consideration for the virtuous. And if, as you say, my father

slew your daughter, in what respect have I, or my brother, given you cause for offense?

Why, since you slew your husband, did you not make over the family home to us? Why hand it over to a second spouse buying the marriage you made at such a price? And why is this new husband not exiled in place of your own son? Why is he not dead on my account, he who slew me living, doomed me to a living death twice for my sister's once? If murder must be atoned for with murder it would seem for the sake of avenging my father that Orestes and myself should pass a sentence of death. I and your son Orestes will slay you, avenging our father thus. For if that act of yours was just, so would be this. And he who for the sake of wealth or exalted birth weds a wicked woman is a fool. A humble marriage with a pure wife is to be preferred to the opulence of the other. (*Or, a humble woman is better than a great one where the bed of virtue is in the home.*)

Chorus. Fortune makes the marriage of women. I see some turning out well for mortals and others not at all well.

Clytemnestra. Oh, child, you were born to love your father always. Things are like that—some are fond of the male parent and others on the other hand love their mothers more than

their fathers. I forgive you. Indeed, I do not exult so very much in the things I have done, my child. But you are not washed and you are ill clad in body for one who has left childbed and has just given birth to her babe. What a wicked thing I am because of what I felt just now! (*Or, what a wretch am I for my plans!*) I drove my husband to anger more than I should.

Electra. You lament late—when there is no remedy. My father, indeed, is dead, but why do you not bring back your son who is wandering abroad?

Clytemnestra. I am afraid. I think of myself, not of him. He is maddened, so they say, by the murder of his father.

Electra. And why have you inflamed your husband against us?

Clytemnestra. It is his way to be so. And you too were born determined.

Electra. I suffer but I will desist from my anger.

Clytemnestra. In that case he (*Aegisthus*) will not be harsh to you.

Electra. He is great-hearted. He lives in my home.

Clytemnestra. Do you see? You are lighting fresh fires of discord.

Electra. I will hold my tongue. I fear him

as I ought to fear him. (*Ironically, meaning not at all.*)

Clytemnestra. Cease from this talk. But why did you summon me, my child?

Electra. You have heard, I dare say, of my childbed. On that account I hope you will make the sacrifices for me, and that of the tenth moon for my child. That is the custom. I do not know precisely. I am not experienced, this being my first born, and I was childless in the olden time.

Clytemnestra. This is the task of another—of her who delivered you of the child.

Electra. I delivered myself, for alone I brought the child into the world.

Clytemnestra. You dwell so much apart from friends?

Electra. Nobody wants to acknowledge poor, poverty-stricken friends.

Clytemnestra. Well, I will go and offer to the gods the due number of sacrifices for the child. (*The reference is to the tenth day after the birth of the babe, upon which the newly made mother, if able, offered the prescribed sacrifice to Diana and gave the little one its name.*) When I have done you this service I will go to the field in which my husband is offering a sacrifice to the nymphs. (*She turns to her retinue.*) You, servants, lead these

horses to the stables and put them in the stalls and when you find that I have fulfilled the sacrifice to the gods, come back. For I must do a service also for my husband. (*The horses and the chariot are led away by the whole retinue.*)

Electra. Come into my humble home and take good care that this smoky roof does not sully your garments. For you are to sacrifice what you ought to sacrifice to the gods. (*After this enigmatical expression, not understood in its true sense by Clytemnestra, she goes within the farm house while Electra stands upon the threshold to speak words not intended for her mother's ear.*) The basket is ready and the knife is sharpened that slew the bull beside which you, too, shall fall stricken and you shall be espoused in the palace of the king of Hades with him by whose side you slept above the ground in the light of day. (*She goes into the house.*)

Chorus. Retribution for sins!

The breezes of this house blow another way, other currents are forming.

Once upon a time my king fell while in his bath and the roof echoed his cries and the stone tiles uttered these words: "Oh, relentless spouse, why do you slay me who have come

home to my native land after ten years?"
(*The length of the war before Troy.*)

But now Justice, retracing her course, overwhelms this unfortunate woman because of her infidelity in wedlock, this woeful woman, who having taken an axe into her hands slew with her own force and with the sharpened edge at a blow the husband who came home after a long, long time to his palace halls amid the lofty walls reared by the Cyclops. (*The walls of Mycenae were built by prehistoric giants with one eye apiece.*)

Oh, miserable husband, what a woe was his in having that wretched woman!

Like a mountain lioness dwelling among the oaks of the deep wood in darkness she did these things. (*A din is heard within the house. There are sounds of flying feet and the shrieks of a woman mingled with the cries of men.*)

Clytemnestra (her voice is heard within the house.) Oh, my children, in the name of the gods, do not slay your mother!

Chorus. Did you hear that shriek in the house?

Clytemnestra (within.) Oh! Oh! Oh!

Chorus. I, too, lament for one slain by her children.

The god (*Jove*) distributes his retribution in due time.

You suffer terrible things, indeed, yet you worked wickedness against your husband, unfortunate woman!

Orestes emerges from the house in disorder, followed by Electra. Pylades shows his face at a window. The brother and the sister are bespattered with blood.

Here they are setting foot forth from the house dyed in the newly shed blood of their own mother—dire proof of the suffering that prompted the cries she uttered. There is no house now and there never before was one more woeful than that of the descendants of Tantalus.

ACT V

In the brief interval between this and the act that precedes—the scene being unchanged—the sister and the brother have contrived to remove the more sanguinary aspects and traces of their deed. The Chorus are huddled together in obvious anguish of mind. It is now well towards evening and a star is visible.

The bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus repose side by side upon the ground at the door of the house while Pylades stands guard beside them. Orestes and Electra are in the road outside the line of palings.

Orestes. Oh Earth, and you, Jove, who behold all mortal things, look down upon these bloody acts, these two bodies side by side upon the ground, laid low by a blow from my own hand, the penalty they paid for my sufferings!

Electra. Brother, you shed many a tear and I am the cause, the guilty one. Wretch that I am, it was I who went through the fire against that mother who bore me, her own daughter. Alas for your misfortune, your destiny, oh my mother who bore me, suffering things terrible,

grievous and beyond all thought at the hands of your own children! And yet you have paid a just penalty for the murder of my father.

Orestes. Oh, Apollo, you prescribed this act of justice and you have wrought the woes that are indescribable and yet manifest. You have done out of the land of Greece this bed of adultery and slaughter. But into what other land am I to go? What stranger will take me for a guest? What pious man will respect the hairs of my head now that I have slain my mother?

Electra. Oh! Where shall I go myself? Into what dance shall I rush? Into what marriage shall I enter? What husband would receive me into a conjugal bed?

Orestes. Again, again, your mind has changed like the wind. Now you think like a pious girl of holy things and not at all as you thought a moment ago. You have done wickedness and terrible deeds, sister, and those against your own brother who did not wish to perpetrate them. Did you see how the wretched creature threw off her robes and showed her breast while we murdered her, oh me! And how she stretched out on the ground those limbs amid which I was brought into the world? My heart is dead within me.

Electra. I knew it well—you went through

agony as you heard the shriek so terrible of the mother who bore you.

Orestes. And she uttered this cry, placing her hand upon my chin: "My child, I implore you!" And she hung upon my neck so that the weapon seemed to drop from my hands.

Electra. Woe is me—how could you bear to see with your own eyes the murder of a mother expiring as you looked?

Orestes. But I wrapped my cloak about my head and began the slaughter with my sword, burying it in my mother's neck.

Electra. And I all the time urged you on and with you I laid hand upon the sword.

Orestes. Oh—you have avowed the most terrible of crimes! Come, hide the limbs of my mother in the folds of a cloak and press her wounds together. (*He addresses the body of Clytemnestra.*) You bore your own murderers.

Electra approaches the body of Clytemnestra and arranges the coverings more decently.

Electra. And now we throw our cloaks over you, beloved and yet not beloved, last of the great tragedies of our house!

There is a blaze of light above. Music is heard and a peal of thunder.

Chorus. Here are some gods surely come down from the skies to appear above the loftiest summits here—above this home. The path

they tread is not that of mortals. Why do they come into the sight of man?

Above the farm house in a great chariot drawn by dragons, are the twin brothers, Castor and Pollux. Castor is an exquisite youth in a helmet and panoply bearing a lance. From head to foot he is golden. His brother Pollux is just like him but he is from head to foot all silver. The brothers comprise the so-called Dioscuri or sons of Jove. Both had disappeared from the earth before the Greeks went against Troy. Jove placed them, it seems, among the stars in Gemini. They were the uncles of Orestes and Electra.

Dioscuri. Listen, son of Agamemnon, the twin sons of Jupiter, brothers of your mother, Castor and Pollux—Castor speaks to you—summon you forth. After we had lulled a tempest terrible to travelers, we went to Argos when we beheld the bloody corpse of our sister, your mother. Her punishment is just but your deed is not so. And Apollo, Apollo—but I will hold my tongue for he is my king. However wise he may be he has ordered what is unwise. Necessity alone justifies this. We must submit to these things. As for what ought to be done, we must do what Jove and fate direct respecting you. Give Electra for a wife to Pylades and as for you, go from

Argos. It is not permitted you to enter into that city, since you have slain your mother.

And the dire Furies, the dog-eyed goddesses, will hound you, wandering in your mania. When you have reached Athens, fall down before the sacred image of Pallas. (*Minerva.*) She will repel your foes, those Furies, for they will be terrified by her dragons as she covers your head with her shield so threatening.

There is a certain hill of Ares (*the Areopagus*) where the gods once sat to cast their votes regarding a deed of blood when strong Mars slew Halirrhothion (*he did violence to a maid whose father—Mars—slew him*) son of the lord of the sea, the father enraged at the unholy espousals of his daughter.

There a most revered verdict and certain judgment is rendered in the name of the gods (*The hill of Mars or Martial Field was where sat the celebrated Athenian court of the Areopagus.*)

There must you too be tried for murder. The votes, all equal, will save you so that you will not suffer death. (*The suffrages would be evenly divided.*) For Apollo, having ordered the slaying of your mother, incurs the guilt himself. And this law will be established for generations to come: the accused will always be acquitted when the vote is equal.

Those dire goddess (*the Furies*) struck with grief upon seeing you absolved, will retrace their way back to the bosom of the earth, beside a sacred hill, and this will become yet the seat of an oracle honored among mortals.

You will fix your home among the Arcadians on the banks of the Alphaeus near the Lycaean temple (*of Jove, in ruins*) and the town shall henceforth be called by your name.

These things I have now said to you.

The body of Aegisthus will be put in a tomb by the people of Argos. As for your mother's body, Menelaus, who has just reached the port of Nauplius, since has conquered the Trojan land, will bury it, with the aid of Helen. She has left Egypt and arrived to-day from the halls of Proteus (*her host there*) for she did not go to the land of the Phrygians at all. (*There was a story to the effect that the beautiful Helen never really went with Paris to Troy but stayed in Egypt all through the Trojan war. The Helen who appeared in Troy was a counterfeit made by the gods.*) Jove, so that strife and a slaughter of mortals might be brought about, sent to Ilion an imitation of Helen.

Let Pylades then lead hence from the Achai-an land the spouse and virgin both. Let him lead to Phocis—his own country—the man who

was united in name only to Electra and let him be loaded with benefits.

Now go, cross the high land of the Isthmus (of Corinth) and proceed straight to the blessed rock of the Cecrops (Athens). Having fulfilled the dire destiny of murder, you will be happy, delivered at last from your woes.

Chorus. Oh, sons of Jove, is it permitted us to address you?

Dioscuri. It is, since you are not stained with these murders.

Orestes. Sons of Tyndareus, may I not too speak with you?

Dioscuri. You too. I will place upon Apollo the burden of this bloody deed.

Chorus. Since you are both gods and brothers to her who perished, why did you not repel these woes from this house?

Dioscuri. The fatality of doom and the unwise oracles of Apollo brought on this tragedy.

Electra. But what Apollo and what oracles destined me to become the murderess of my mother?

Dioscuri. You acted together and your destinies were in common and the same crime of your fathers ruined you both.

Orestes. Oh, my sister, having seen you again after so long a time, I am to lose your caresses

almost immediately and I will be bereft of you and you of me!

DioscURI. There are for her a husband and a home. It is not she who suffered pitiable things except that she must leave the city of the Argives.

Orestes. And what woes are more dire than those of quitting one's native land? But I will depart from the home of my father and I will submit the murder of my mother to the suffrages of aliens.

DioscURI. Courage! You will go to the holy city of Pallas (*Athens*). Endure!

Electra. Lay your breast against my breast, dear brother. The sanguinary curses of a mother exile us from the halls of our fathers.

Orestes. Put your arms around me and weep upon my shoulder as you might weep upon the tomb of a dead man. (*They embrace.*)

DioscURI. Alas! You have spoken what it is terrible to hear even in the ears of a god. Pity for all mortals in misery is natural to me as it is to all the gods.

Orestes. (*To his sister.*) Never again shall I see you.

Electra. Nor shall I enter your sight again.

Orestes. These are your last words to me.

Electra. Farewell, native city, and to you, ladies (*to the chorus*) I bid many an adieu.

Orestes. Most faithful sister, you depart?

Electra. I go—my eyes moist with tears.

Orestes. Pylades, go on your way rejoicing. Make Electra your wife. (*Pylades takes the form of Electra in his arms and she swoons.*)

DioscURI. This marriage is their concern. But you (to *Orestes*) fly from these dog fiends (the *Furies*) and proceed to Athens. (*The Furies were a grim sisterhood dwelling in the shades below. They slumbered in the obscurity of the caves of hell until an unusually impious crime perpetrated by a mortal awoke them. They thereupon arose to the surface of the earth and pursued the guilty person. The Furies were elderly virgins in long black cloaks and they seem to have had serpents in their hair.*) They take up their relentless march against you, their hands equipped with serpents dire, their bodies black, bearing the fruits of agonizing terror. As for us, we must hasten to the Sicilian seas there to rescue the brine-swept prows of ships. Treading the ethereal depths of the skies, we bring no comfort to the wicked, but those who love piety and justice, to them we bring deliverance from their woes. Therefore let no one aim at iniquity nor go the way of the blasphemer. Being a god, I speak thus to men. (*Lightning flashes. The twin gods depart. Electra recov-*

*ers herself in the arms of Pylades as Orestes
wends his way along the road leading towards
Athens, cowering from the aspect of the Fur-
ies, invisible to all but himself.)*

Chorus. Farewell! He among mortals who
knows how to rejoice, he who is not wrung by
any woe, he attains blessedness, he achieves
felicity.

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